

COMMUNICATION

FROM

PLINY MILES, OF NEW YORK,

IN FAVOR OF

A reform of the Postal system, accompanied by a bill.

FEBRUARY 23, 1857.—Ordered to lie on the table and be printed.

OFFICE OF THE POSTAL REFORM COMMITTEE,
New York, February 21, 1857.

DEAR SIR: The lengthy petition for certain reforms in our postal system, which I had the pleasure of showing to you last summer in Washington, has been sent to one of our representatives, Hon. John Wheeler, and will probably be presented to the House next week. It contains over 10,400 names, and among others, I believe your own, including nearly every prominent citizen in New York. The enclosed draft of a bill has been drawn up by our committee, and I am instructed to forward a copy to you, and one to Mr. Wheeler. We do not think it very likely that the bill will be passed this session, but the Postal Reform Committee are very desirous that the bill should be introduced, either by itself, or as an amendment to some other postal bill. Mr. Wheeler has been instructed to use every exertion to introduce the bill in the House, probably as an "amendment" to the bill providing for a "money order system," but in case he does not get such opportunity, (or even if he does, it might be advisable to have it introduced in the other House,) the committee are desirous of having it introduced in the Senate. I believe Mr. Weller has introduced a bill for reducing letter postages for all distances over 3,000 miles from ten cents to three cents. Perhaps this bill could be introduced as an amendment to that. This bill has been drawn with great care, and has been submitted for revision to an ex-member of Congress, and it covers all the ground of our petition. It is in many places and particulars worded like some portions of the English law, and, if you should desire it, I can give substantial reasons for every section of it. Not one item of the bill but has been proved successful and practicable either in this country or Great Britain.

Our committee are very desirous that the bill should be reported

this session, and come before the people for discussion, and we are confident that it can be passed next session.

I have the honor to be, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
PLINY MILES,

Secretary of the N. Y. Postal Reform Committee.

Hon. WILLIAM H. SEWARD,

U. S. Senator from New York.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, That from and after the thirteenth day of June, eighteen hundred and fifty-seven, in lieu of the rates of postage now established by law, there shall be charged the following rates, to wit: for every letter not exceeding half an ounce in weight that is deposited in a post office for delivery, or that is conveyed by mail within the limits of the United States, the postage, when prepaid, shall be two cents; and for each letter that weighs over half an ounce, and not over an ounce, the postage, when prepaid, shall be four cents; and for each letter that exceeds an ounce in weight, and does not exceed two ounces, the postage, when prepaid, shall be eight cents, and for all heavier letters, the postage, when prepaid, shall be at the same rate, that is, four cents for each ounce in weight, and for any fraction of an ounce beyond the last ounce; and for letters that are not prepaid, the postage shall in all cases be double the above mentioned rates.

SEC. 2. *And be it further enacted,* That for all books and other transient printed matter (not newspapers or periodicals with the postage paid quarterly or yearly in advance) the postage, when prepaid, shall be as follows: for each package weighing not more than four ounces, two cents; for each package exceeding four ounces in weight, and not exceeding eight ounces, four cents; for each package exceeding eight ounces, and not exceeding sixteen ounces, eight cents; for each package exceeding one pound, or sixteen ounces, and not exceeding a pound and a half, twelve cents; for each package exceeding a pound and a half, and not exceeding two pounds, sixteen cents; and for each additional pound beyond the first two pounds, and for any fraction of a pound beyond the last pound, the additional sum of eight cents: *Provided always,* That such books or transient printed matter be sent in packages, open at the ends or sides, and do not contain any writing, (except as hereafter provided,) any letter, or other enclosure, in addition to such book or printed matter as aforesaid.

SEC. 3. *And be it further enacted,* That the same rates of postage charged on "books and other transient printed matter" mentioned in the foregoing section, shall be charged, when prepaid, on any number of separate books, pamphlets, printed sheets, pictures, maps and any number of sheets or pieces of paper, parchment or vellum, printed or blank, that are done up in the same package, and left open at the ends or sides (not including letters, either sealed or open.) And the books, pictures, maps or other publications deposited in a post office for delivery or sent by mail, may be either printed, written or blank,

or any mixture of the three, and they also may have erasures or marginal corrections in manuscript, and presentation books may have the presentation or any other matter written on either of the blank pages at the commencement of the book, or on the title page, and all legitimate binding, mounting or covering of a book or other publication, or of a portion thereof may accompany it, whether such binding be loose or attached, as also rollers for pictures or maps, markers (whether of paper or other material) in books, and whatever is necessary for the safe transmission or due preservation of literary or artistic matter, or usually pertains thereto.

SEC. 4. *And be it further enacted*, That all printed and other matter mentioned in the two foregoing sections that are deposited in a post office for delivery, or sent by mail, without being prepaid, shall be charged double the rates above mentioned; and in no case shall any letter, book, package of printed or other matter be sent by mail, except by order of the Postmaster General, unless the postage be prepaid, provided the postage at the prepaid rate exceeds sixteen cents, except such letters and packages as are addressed to some one or more of the departments, government officers, or members of Congress at Washington city.

All books and packages of printed and other matter, as defined in the two preceding sections, shall be considered as mailable matter, provided they do not exceed ten pounds in weight, but no book or other package shall be sent by mail, except by order of the Postmaster General, if it exceeds two feet in length, width or depth.

SEC. 5. *And be it further enacted*, That from and after the thirtieth day of June, eighteen hundred and fifty-seven, the following shall be the rates of postage on newspapers and periodical publications that are taken regularly, and have the postage paid by the quarter or year in advance: Weekly newspapers, per year, twenty cents; semi-weekly newspapers, per year, forty cents; tri-weekly newspapers, per year, sixty cents; newspapers published six times a week, per year, one dollar and twenty cents. And all newspapers that are published at other intervals or periods of time shall be charged at the same, or a proportionate rate; that is, at the rate of twenty cents for fifty-two numbers or copies. Monthly periodicals, not exceeding four ounces in weight, twelve cents a year; over four and not exceeding eight ounces each, twenty-four cents a year; over eight and not exceeding sixteen ounces, forty-eight cents a year; and in the same proportion for those of greater weight. Semi-monthly periodicals double the rate of the monthly; quarterly publications one third the rate; and others in the same proportion. All newspapers and periodicals that pass through the post office without having the postage paid quarterly or yearly in advance, shall be considered and rated as transient matter, but extra copies or back numbers of any newspaper or periodical publication that are sent by a publisher or dealer to a subscriber, whether prepaid or not, shall be delivered at the prepaid rates of transient matter.

SEC. 5. *And be it further enacted*, That none of the following articles shall be sent by mail on any conditions, viz: glass-bottles, or glass in any form; razors, scissors, needles, pins, knives, forks, or other sharp

instruments, or cutlery ; leeches, game, fish, meat, fruit, or vegetables, bladders, or other vessels containing liquids ; gunpowder, friction matches, or any other articles that are explosive or combustible, or liable to become putrid, or to injure the mails.

SEC. 7. *And be it further enacted*, That any excess of postage not paid on any letter or package that is prepaid in part, shall be charged at double the prepaid rates, and all letters and packages when prepaid, that are forwarded from the office to which they were originally addressed, shall be forwarded at prepaid rates, but double these rates shall be charged for forwarding, provided the postage was not prepaid to its first destination.

SEC. 8. *And be it further enacted*, That the Postmaster General be authorized to make such regulations for the reception and mailing of "late letters" as he may deem advisable, levying an extra charge on all letters that are mailed after the ordinary time of closing the letter box: *Provided*, That such extra charge is not more than two cents for a letter or package without regard to weight, up to the last fifteen minutes, nor more than four cents during the last fifteen minutes before the mail leaves the post office, except in the case of foreign letters, and on these the extra charge shall not exceed the ordinary postage.

And in all such cases "late letters" shall not be received and forwarded after the ordinary time of closing the box, unless the full postage and the extra charge are both prepaid by stamps.

SEC. 9. *And be it further enacted*, That the Postmaster General shall establish a system of letter collection and delivery without any charge to the public except the rates of postage provided in this act, in each city and post town that pays a net income to the department of four hundred dollars or more ; the system of collection and delivery to be by letter carriers and receiving houses, the expenses to be defrayed from the net proceeds of the Post Office Department the same as contractors for carrying the mail are now paid. The number of letter deliveries per day shall be regulated with a just regard to the wants of the public and the increase of correspondence, and the number of receiving houses in a city or town shall not exceed one for every three thousand inhabitants within the delivery of the post office.

SEC. 10. *And be it further enacted*, That all letter receivers, or keepers of receiving houses, shall be required to keep on hand, and for sale at all times, the various sizes or denominations of postage stamps that are issued by the Post Office Department, and the said receivers, in addition to their salaries or commissions, shall be entitled to a profit equal to a discount of five per cent. on the price of all stamps sold by them.

SEC. 11. *And be it further enacted*, That letter receivers shall not be required to deliver letters or packages to the public other than carriers or persons duly authorized by the Post Office Department to receive the same for distribution, mailing, or delivery, nor shall they or any postmasters, or deputy postmasters or clerks, or any one of them, in any post office or receiving house, be required to weigh or rate any letters or other packages for the public, with the exception of those addressed to a foreign country, nor shall they or any of them be

required to affix the stamps on any letters or packages that are to be sent by mail or delivered.

SEC. 12. *And be it further enacted*, That the Postmaster General shall establish a system for remitting money by mail, through the medium of money orders or drafts, to be drawn by certain postmasters or post offices, authority being given by the Post Office Department to draw and pay such money orders.

SEC. 13. *And be it further enacted*, That no post office shall be authorized to draw or pay money orders, or be made a money order office, except such post offices as pay in net proceeds to the department the sum of four hundred dollars annually ; and every postmaster, before being authorized to draw or pay money orders, shall execute such bond and security for the due performance of the trust as shall be satisfactory to the Postmaster General.

SEC. 14. *And be it further enacted*, That each money order for a sum not exceeding ten dollars, shall pay a commission of five cents, and each money order for a sum exceeding ten dollars and not exceeding twenty dollars, shall pay a commission of ten cents; and no order shall be granted for any sum exceeding twenty dollars.

SEC. 15. *And be it further enacted*, That no money order that is presented for payment after six clear months have elapsed from and after the month in which it was granted, shall be paid without another order being taken out and another commission paid ; and if not presented within two years from the time it was originally granted, it shall not be paid at all, except by the special order of the Postmaster General.

SEC. 16. *And be it further enacted*, That all due care shall be exercised by the postmasters and other officers to see that money orders are paid to the right persons ; but after being once paid, no further claim shall be made on the department, nor shall the department be further held responsible. It shall be the duty of the Postmaster General to frame such regulations for the management of the money order branch of the Post Office (not inconsistent with this act) as he considers most conducive to the security of the department and the convenience of the public.

SEC. 17. *And be it further enacted*, That the Postmaster General shall cause all dead and refused letters to be sent to the writers, whenever known, and in the shortest time practicable after such letters become "dead" or are refused ; and in all cases where the address of the sender is written, printed or stamped on the outside of the letter, or impressed on the seal, they shall be returned without opening.

SEC. 18. *And be it further enacted*, That all refused and other "dead" letters that have the postage paid in advance, shall be returned without charge to the writer ; but, in cases where postage is due, the person addressed shall be charged with such postage ; and, in case payment is refused, the writer may be compelled to pay by summary process, or be imprisoned not exceeding ten days for each offence by order of any magistrate having competent jurisdiction in the case.

SEC. 19. *And be it further enacted*, That the Postmaster General be authorized to employ a sufficient number of clerks, not exceeding sixty-five, to carry out the provisions of the two preceding sections,

and the sum of one hundred thousand dollars is hereby appropriated for that purpose.

SEC. 20. *And be it further enacted*, That the privilege of franking, sending, and receiving letters and other packages free of postage, heretofore extended to official and other persons, shall be, and the same is hereby, abrogated, except in the cases of the ex-Presidents now living, and the widows of ex-Presidents Harrison, Polk, and Taylor, who shall continue as heretofore to enjoy the privilege of sending and receiving letters and printed matter free of all charges whatsoever.

SEC. 21. *And be it further enacted*, That the Postmaster General shall prepare and furnish, for the use of the several government departments and the President, printed envelopes or wrappers for government documents and correspondence, said envelopes or wrappers to be received at the Post Office in Washington, as government matter, the postage to be charged to the particular department that it comes from, provided they are mailed by a known officer or messenger of the government, and not otherwise.

SEC. 22. *And be it further enacted*, That the postage on all government mail matter mailed at Washington, in accordance with the provisions of the preceding section, and all the mail matter addressed to any of the departments, government officers or members of Congress at Washington, and mailed without being prepaid, shall be charged to the department or branch of Congress mailing or receiving the same, and at prepaid rates; the expense of the same to be paid by appropriations from the treasury, the same as provided for other government expenses.

SEC. 23. *And be it further enacted*, That all government mail matter, mailed or received in accordance with either of the two preceding sections, may be weighed in bulk and charged at the rate of five cents for every ounce of the letters, and twelve cents for every pound of the printed matter; but no provisions of this, or either of the two preceding sections, shall apply to the transportation, or charge for mail matter, for the government, except such as is sent from, or received at, the post office in Washington city.

SEC. 24. *And be it further enacted*, That the postage on all mail matter that is prepaid, shall be prepaid by stamps, except on letters or other mail matter addressed to foreign countries, and the postage on such mail matter may be paid either in stamps or money at the option of the sender.

SEC. 25. *And be it further enacted*, That it shall be the duty of all post masters, sub-postmasters, and letter receivers to keep a supply of postage stamps, of all denominations, on hand and for sale at all times, and, when out of stamps, they shall receive no commissions or compensation for the letters and other mail matter that may be sent out from their respective offices, and sent unpaid.

SEC. 26. *And be it further enacted*, That no postmaster, deputy postmaster, clerk, or letter receiver shall sell or dispose of any postage stamps at a higher or lower price than the price named on the stamps, under a penalty of one hundred dollars for each offence. And any person, whether engaged in the postal service of the United

States or not, who sells any postage stamps or stamped envelopes at a higher rate than the regularly authorized price, as established by the department, shall pay a fine of one hundred dollars for each offence.

SEC. 27. *And be it further enacted*, That all the provisions of this act shall take effect from and after the thirtieth day of June, eighteen hundred and fifty-seven; and all acts and parts of acts not in accordance with this shall be, and the same are hereby, repealed.

